

# Letter from Taizé

www.taize.fr  
**Taizé**  
**2001/02**  
28 December - 1 January  
**BUDAPEST**

To share with tens of thousands of young adults from every continent, not only for days of inner life and prayer, but also experiences that enable trust to grow among people, groups and nations.

See page 3

PROCESSED

MAY 31 2001

GTU LIBRARY



## Happy the Simple in Heart!

From many European countries as well as from other continents took part in the international meetings in Taizé.

Among them there were over 3000 from France, several hundred from Portugal, Spain and Romania, and others from Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Croatia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, Cape Verde, Indonesia, Korea, Mexico.... More than 2000 young Germans spent the week after Easter in Taizé.

### A Yes for Life

During the Easter morning celebration, a brother of Polish nationality made his life-commitment in the community. The evening before, with the 6000 young people present in Taizé together in the church, Brother Roger ex-

plained to them the meaning of what would happen:

"Tomorrow morning our brother Krzysztof, from Poland, will pronounce the yes by which he will commit himself for life in our community. By responding to this call from God, he will live out a trust in God that he will



renew constantly throughout his lifetime. The simple desire to follow Christ for life makes our heart attentive to one of the first words of Christ in the Gospel: 'Happy the simple in heart; they will see God, they will glimpse who God is!' The life of our community, which our brother Krzysztof is entering, presupposes a great simplicity of heart and a simplicity in daily life. Searching for this simplicity means accepting that we cannot understand everything about the Gospel, about God, about Christ, straightaway. Living in great simplicity leads us to consent to our own weaknesses, since it is so true that we are poor people of the Gospel and will remain so our whole lives long.

"We discover by living together in community that, as we find rest by trusting in God, we allow the Holy Spirit to transform our hearts, step by step. And, with a humble faith, God will enable us to create with him and with many others in this communion in Christ which is the Church. The Holy Spirit, present in us, makes a conversion of our heart possible. The Holy Spirit enables us to understand that God loves us and that God searches for each one of us even before we love him. And so, in a life lived for Christ and the Gospel, we can be deeply astonished to discover that God looks at every human being without exception with infinite tenderness and deep compassion.

"In two or three weeks, our brother Krzysztof will go back to Brazil, where we have been for thirty years. And he is happy not only to live among the poor, but also to live with the brothers who are expecting him."

## Preparing the Meeting in Budapest

The eve of Easter, one of the brothers then spoke about the upcoming meeting in Budapest:

"When we read the New Testament writings one after another, after the stories of the Resurrection we find a book called the Acts of the Apostles. That makes us understand that the life of the Risen Christ, a life of trust in the Risen Christ, does not lead to an abstraction, but to a life, to acts, to a history that is lived out.

"In the Acts of the Apostles, we find people who abandoned Christ during his passion. But now they are together again. It is as if one of the first consequences of the Resurrection was to bring together what had been scattered, to allow people who were demoralized to stand up once again.

"These witnesses to the Resurrection

kept on traveling, going from place to place, to reach the ends of the earth if possible.

"Everywhere in their life we find the desire to gather together, to awaken a hope, to kindle a fire, to break down walls. They were not resigned to divisions.

"And this hope was made concrete in humble initiatives—hospitality offered or accepted, visits, praying together, sharing with the most deprived.

"This history continues. We are together this evening in the name of the same hope.

"Throughout the year 2001, we would like additional chapters of this book to be written by our lives. Simplicity of heart means also accepting, perhaps with surprise, that this light can shine through each one of us.

"Every year after Christmas we hold a young adult European meeting. This year it will take place in Budapest, from 28 December to 1 January. So many young Hungarians and Hungarian families cannot wait to welcome us!

"In the coming months, we want to prepare ourselves for the meeting in Budapest, here in Taizé, particularly during the summer months in the meetings that will be held each week. There will also be local preparations everywhere.

"Preparing for the meeting means, among other things, looking for ways to welcome into our lives the peace which the Risen Christ left his disciples on Easter evening. It means welcoming forgiveness, refusing to be discouraged, not running away but running toward, like the disciples on Easter morning.

"Like the apostles, sometimes we may be afraid. The Acts of the Apostles does not hide the fact that this was so for them. But by taking the road of the wellsprings, we can, like them, let our fear and anxieties be transformed into joy and trust."

## Africa Needs Us

Finally, on the eve of Easter, another brother of the community, from Congo, spoke about Africa:

"I have just come back from Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo where I spent a month with my family and friends. Many families there are living in extreme poverty. So I ask myself questions: what future is there for those children and youth who can no longer go to school because their parents do not have enough money to pay the fees? What future for those families who only eat one meal a day, if not three meals a week? What future for those sick people who cannot even get basic medical care, because they have no resources? Africa needs us, it needs us to pray as well as to act."

For some, mention of the Hungarian capital brings back the memory of the meeting held there ten years ago, shortly after the great political changes in Europe. There was a lot of enthusiasm. Now, ten years later, how have people continued to adapt to their new social and economic reality? How do Christians use the freedom they have gained to be present in public life?

## At the Crossroads of East and West, North and South

For others, Budapest is a symbolic city, situated at the crossroads of East and West, North and South. A long history has left its marks there, from the borders of the Roman empire to the more recent struggles for independence after the centuries of Ottoman occupation. Presently, the country is at the edge of the European Union, which it will enter in a few years. In this situation, how can contacts be broadened and dialogue fostered with neighboring cultures and realities, not just with the West but with the East as well?

As soon as the meeting was announced, young Hungarians expressed their joy and their hope. Here are some excerpts from their reactions:

Andras: Welcoming young people we do not yet know, trying to understand them, means for me already beginning to become interested in them, in their life at home. Personally I am very touched when a foreigner knows something about Hungary, our history, our wounds. We need to discover that in spite of our differences we can count on one another, that there is a common desire for friendship. At the present time we are celebrating a thousand years of Christianity in our country. The meeting will give us a good opportunity to reflect on the best we have to share with others.

The meeting will also help to dissipate the false idea that young peoples who go to church are distant, too serious and a bit cold, that they are afraid of life. I will be happy to be able to "show" that young Christians are open, joyful, full of life and vitality.

Mistrust exists among the peoples of central and eastern Europe. At a time when we are trying to have good relations with the West, with the European Union, this meeting will also help us build up trust among ourselves. In the East, people who are poorer than us economically are rich in human and spiri-



# Pilgrimage of Trust in Budapest

The next stage of the pilgrimage of trust

across the earth, the European meeting in Budapest, will be an opportunity to share with tens of thousands of young adults from every continent, not only for days of inner life and prayer, but also experiences that enable trust to grow among people, groups and nations.

## Renewing the Life of Our Communities

Orsi: Ten years ago, we took part in the meeting in Budapest with handicapped friends who were living in a social center. They were always dependent on others when they wanted to leave the center. In some sense, the five days we spent together during the meeting were a symbol. After the closed world of their household, they suddenly found themselves caught up in a joyful and colorful crowd, praying, singing and sharing with Europe, with the whole world. They discovered a joy they had never before known; they felt free and they truly were free. The last day, we were afraid to bring them back home where everything would go back to what it was before. But to our great surprise, while waiting for the metro they kept on singing and turning round in their wheelchairs. They said that no one could take away from them what they had received during those five days.

Over the last ten years some of our hopes were realized, others were not. The enthusiasm at the beginning of the new regime, which brought many people into the churches, died away and often people are not faithful. The Church cannot and does not even want to compete with the temptations and the short-lived fireworks of the consumer society. I hope that the meeting will help us come together to find ways of supporting young people who are present in the parishes. How can we renew the lives of our communities to welcome those who are searching, whose road has been difficult, those who are excluded, who are alone?

people who are searching but who do not find their place in the historical churches can find a road to faith. Today there are many more young people without hope and without roots than there were ten years ago.

Istvan: The former socialist countries are close to Budapest, so I hope that many Russians, Ukrainians, Balts, Romanians, Bulgarians, Slovenians, Serbs, Croats, Poles, Czechs and Slovaks will come to the meeting. This can be an opportunity to bring Eastern and Western Christians closer together; nations who did not appreciate one another very much in past decades will share a common experience. The geographical situation of Budapest can make it possible for many more young people from surrounding countries to come and take part in the meeting.

tual values. The meeting will help us to discover the importance of these values for our future.

Eszter: What is essential for me is that finally we will be able to live something together, among different Christians. Through my parents, I know a bit about what is happening in the Catholic and Lutheran churches, and I know that there are still lots of barriers in people's heads. My hope is that this meeting can be a tangible proof that it is possible for Christians to find unity without the "yes, but..." you so often hear, and that finally a broader process is set in motion starting from the ground upwards. I hope that the amazing national and denominational diversity of such a meeting will give new impetus and ideas to go forward. I hope too that the young



www.taize.fr  
**Taizé**  
**2001/02**  
28 December - 1 January  
**BUDAPEST**



What does it mean to say "God is spirit"?

Is God almighty?

These somewhat enigmatic words of Jesus are found in Saint John's Gospel, in the story of the Samaritan woman. She asks Jesus where one should worship God. He replies that encountering God is not linked to a geographical place, and he adds, "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4,24). By affirming that it is possible to enter into a relationship with God everywhere, Jesus is faithful to the tradition of his people, Israel. An age-old prayer says to God, "Where could I go to escape your spirit; where could I flee from your face? If I go up to heaven, you are present; if I lie down in the nether world, there you are" (Psalm 139). God can come to anyone, wherever they are.

But Jesus also confirms the religious feeling that God cannot be worshipped just anywhere. We must worship "in spirit and in truth." This does not just mean "spiritually and truly" but rather designates a *place* for worship. This place called "spirit and truth" is communion in God, a temple "not made with human hands" that Christ built by his resurrection (Mark 14,58). God who is spirit never ceases to create his own sanctuary in people's hearts by strengthening them in love. He turns us into "a dwelling-place in the spirit" (1 Peter 2,5), built of living stones.

"What is born of flesh is flesh, what is born of spirit is spirit" (John 3,6). The difference is radical. God is "spirit"; we are "flesh," in other words powerless to go beyond our limitations as creatures. When we pray, we may find ourselves in front of an impenetrable wall, or even a void. We cannot reach God by our own resources. Our entire being is "flesh," even the mind with which we search for God. God is beyond what our senses can perceive and our intelligence conceive. Sometimes doubts arise, and even the meaning of the word God becomes unclear.

God is not identified with any reality of this world. It cannot be said of God "he is here" or "he is there" (compare Luke 17,21). His presence is as fleeting as a breath: "The wind blows where it will; you hear it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going" (John 3,8).

The fact that God is spirit does not simply mean that he is totally other. In the Bible, "spirit" is not a static notion, but designates something dynamic, an activity, energies that transform. That God is spirit means that he is searching for us constantly. Life radiates from him and is communicated to us. God transforms us too into spirit according to the words of Christ, "What is born of spirit is spirit." God is spirit; God is alive, and in him we too "live and move and have our being" (Acts 17,28).

In the Creed, we say, "I believe in God, the Father almighty." These words are hard to understand. If God can do anything, could he not prevent evil? Why does he let innocent people suffer?

It is possible that we do not understand correctly what believers intended to express when they began to call God "almighty." Sometimes, the meaning of words changes or is lost as time passes. In the Creed, and in the Bible from where the expression comes, the word "almighty" translates the Greek word *pantokrator*. This word is found ten times in the New Testament, nine of which are in the Book of Revelation. It is not a word from philosophy; it belongs to hymns that greet the coming of God's reign: "We give you thanks, Lord, God almighty, for assuming your great power and beginning your reign" (Rev 11,17).

Persecuted Christians who praised God for his power and his reign knew well from experience that God was not powerful like the powerful people of this world. God has no armed forces, money or a media empire. Nonetheless, there is a reality called "God's reign" that is universal. In other words, no situation, not even a desperate one, escapes God's dominion nor is excluded from his love. "Almighty" was a word of hope for those who used it in this way.

Rather than focusing simply on the words, we should look at Christ: "They will look upon the one they have pierced" (John 19,37). Powerless, nailed to a cross, he kept on loving. When humiliated, Christ revealed the unheard-of power of God's love. "God's weakness is stronger than human beings," writes the apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 1,25). John expresses this by a vision (Rev 4-5): God's reign is symbolized by a heavenly throne-room, with its court that proclaims day and night: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord, God almighty." But then John is astonished to see in the middle of God's throne "a Lamb, as if slaughtered." God reigns over the entire earth with and in the crucified Christ. His reign is also the reign of the Lamb. Since Easter and for all time, in God—in God's heart, one with God—there is someone who is poor and wounded, Jesus who gave his life. The Father almighty is the God whose love is powerful in all things, for "he believes everything, hopes everything, puts up with everything" (1 Corinthians 13,7).

We do not know if Jesus ever used the word "almighty." But he began a prayer by saying, "Abba, everything is possible for you" (Mark 14,36). It was an expression of his trust and hope in God his Father. And we too can pray, "God, you love me; everything is possible for you. Listen to me! Answer me!"



**1 SUN** Lk 9:57-62 Someone said to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus answered, "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

**2 MON** 2 S 22:17-20 The Lord rescued me from enemies who were stronger than I am and set me in the open.

**3 TUE** Ep 2:13-22 **ST THOMAS** In Christ, you are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by the Spirit.

**4 WED** Ex 22:20-21 The Lord says to his people: Do not mistreat or oppress the strangers in your midst, for you too were once strangers in the land of Egypt.

**5 THU** Rm 8:31-39 St. Paul writes: I am certain of this: neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

**6 FRI** Jn 17:6-11 Jesus prayed to his Father for his disciples, saying: I am no longer in the world; they are in the world and I am coming to you, Holy Father. Keep those you have given me true to your name, so that they may be one as we are one.

**7 SAT** Jr 3:12 The Lord says to his people: Return to me, for I am merciful.

**8 SUN** Lk 10:1-9 Jesus sent out his disciples saying: Whenever you go into a town where they make you welcome, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there and say, "The kingdom of God is very near you."

**9 MON** Mt 12:46-50 Jesus said: Any-one who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.

**10 TUE** Pr 23:15-19 Let your heart remain constant in the adoration of God; for there is a future and your hope will not come to nothing.

**11 WED** Jm 1:21-25 James writes: Those who listen to the word of God but do not do what it says are like people who look at their faces in a mirror and, after looking at themselves, go away and immediately forget what they look like.

**12 THU** 1 Th 1:1-5 Paul writes to the Thessalonians: We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

**13 FRI** Ps 40:7-12 Here I am, I have come, and as it is written, I desire to do your will, my God. Your law is deep within my heart.

**14 SAT** Mt 5:1-12 Jesus said: Happy are the clear in heart, for they shall see God.

**15 SUN** Lk 10:25-37 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and love your neighbour as yourself.

**16 MON** Mt 6:25-34 Jesus said: Seek first God's kingdom and his justice, and all other things will be given you in addition.

**17 TUE** Jr 20:7-9 Jeremiah said: The word of the Lord has brought insult and derision upon me. And so I said to myself, "I shall not think about him, I shall no longer speak in his name." But there seemed to be a burning fire in my heart, which I could not contain.

**18 WED** Rm 15:1-7,13 St. Paul writes: We should not try to please ourselves, but consider what is good for our neighbours and so build up community.

**19 THU** 2 Co 13:11-13 Paul writes: Live in joyfulness. Encourage one another. Be of one mind and live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

**20 FRI** Is 55:6-11 Turn to God who will forgive freely. For, thus says the Lord, my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways.

**21 SAT** 2 Co 1:18-24 Paul explained his ministry, saying: We do not want to be masters of your faith, but fellow workers with you for your joy.

**22 SUN** Lk 10:38-42 When she welcomed Jesus, Martha was distracted by the many tasks to be done. Jesus said to her: Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one.

**23 MON** Mt 19:16-22 Jesus said to a rich young man: If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.

**24 TUE** Mt 5:14-16 Jesus said: You are the light of the world. Let your light shine in people's sight, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

**25 WED** Mt 20:20-28 St. James Having called his disciples together, Jesus said: You know that in the world the powerful make their power felt. Among you this is not to happen. No, anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant.

**26 THU** Mt 5:1-12 Jesus said: Happy are they who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be filled. Happy are the merciful, for mercy will be shown to them.

**27 FRI** Sl 27:30-28:7 Forgive your neighbour any wrongs. For if someone nurses anger against another, how can they then ask for healing from God?

**28 SAT** 1 Tm 4:7-16 St. Paul writes: Train yourself to live in godliness: it holds out promise both for the present life and the life to come.

**29 SUN** Lk 11:9-13 Jesus said: Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you.

**30 MON** Rv 3:20-22 The Risen Christ says: I stand at the door, knocking. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them, and they with me.

**31 TUE** Mt 13:31-33 Jesus said: The kingdom of heaven is like the yeast a woman took and mixed in with a large amount of flour until the whole thing rose.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

# JULY

## MEDITATING ON THE WORD



These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

**5 SUN** Lk 12:13-21 Jesus said: Be on your guard against every kind of greed; for a person's life does not consist in the abundance of their possessions.

**6 MON** P 1:19-21 TRANFIGURATION You do well to pay attention to the word of the prophets, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

**7 TUE** Mt 18:1-5 Jesus said: Whoever makes themselves humble like a child is greatest in the kingdom of Heaven. Anyone who welcomes a little child in my name welcomes me.

**8 WED** 1 S 16:1-13 The Lord said to Samuel: Take no notice of appearance. God does not see as human beings see; they look at appearances but God looks at the heart.

**9 THU** Ep 4:1-6 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one Body and one Spirit, just as you have all been called to one hope.

**10 FRI** Si 14:1-6, 14-16 Happy are those who are not in anguish over their failings and who do not founder in despair. For if a person is hard upon themselves, to whom will they be kind?

**11 SAT** Lk 12:22-31 Jesus said: Do not be anxious about your life. Can any of you, by worrying about it, add a single moment to the length of your life? If such a small thing is beyond your power, why worry about the rest?

**12 SUN** Lk 12:32-48 Jesus said: Be like people waiting for their master to return, ready to open the door as soon as he comes and knocks.

**13 MON** Is 45:3-7 The Lord says: Though you did not know me, I have called you by your name.

**14 TUE** 2 Co 3:16-18 Paul writes: All of us, who like mirrors are reflecting God's glory, are being transformed into the image that we reflect.

**15 WED** Lk 1:46-55 THE VIRGIN MARY Mary said: My soul praises the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.

**16 THU** Rm 12:3-13 Be joyful in your hope, steadfast in hardship, faithful in prayer. Be always ready to offer hospitality.

**17 FRI** Ps 62 Trust in God at all times. Pour out your heart to God.

**18 SAT** Jn 15:9-17 Jesus said: You did not choose me. No, I chose you, and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit.

**19 SUN** Lk 12:49-53 Jesus said: I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already burning!

**20 MON** Mk 4:26-29 Jesus said: The kingdom of God is like this: A person scatters seed on the land. Night and day, whether they are awake or asleep, the seed sprouts and grows, they know not how.

**21 TUE** Jn 1:19-27 John said: I baptise with water; but standing among you — unknown to you — is the one who is coming after me; and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandal.

**22 WED** Lk 6:27-35 Jesus said: Treat others as you would like them to treat you.

**23 THU** Ga 5:13-14 You were called to be free. Do not use your freedom for self-indulgence but to serve one another in love.

**24 FRI** Heb 2:5-18 Because Christ himself suffered when he was put to the test, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

**25 SAT** Jn 12:35-36 Jesus said to his disciples: Believe in the light so that you may become children of light.

**26 SUN** Is 66:18 The Lord says: I am coming to gather the people of every nation and language, and they will see my glory.

**27 MON** Mk 1:16-20 Jesus said to his first disciples, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of people." And at once they left their nets and followed him.

**28 TUE** Si 2:1-11 If you want to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for trials. Be sincere of heart and steadfast. Do not be alarmed by adversity, but attach yourself to the Lord and do not leave him.

**29 WED** Ac 20:17-38 Paul said: Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, who said, "There is more happiness in giving than in receiving."

**30 THU** 1 Jn 4:7-11 Let us love one another, for love is of God and whoever loves is born of God and knows God.

**31 FRI** Lk 4:1-13 Jesus answered the tempter saying, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

# AUGUST

## MEDITATING ON THE WORD



Although we associate the "good news" above all with the message and life of Jesus Christ, we should not forget that its roots are found long before the New Testament period, from the very first revelation of the biblical God. Christians have too often seen in the faith of Israel only a religion of "law," an attempt to achieve salvation by one's own efforts. On the contrary, the people of the Bible never lost the awareness that God's love came first, for even their existence as a nation was a pure gift of divine goodness.

This is particularly evident in the foundational event of the nation's life, the Exodus from Egypt, as it is recounted in the Book of Deuteronomy. Moses explains how the God of the entire universe chose a tiny group of men and women to make himself known to all humanity. God did this out of love, in other words by a free choice that was not at all determined by the qualities or the activity of his partner. For this God is "free of favoritism," and cannot be flattered or bribed. On the contrary, God shows special attention to "the orphan, the widow and the foreigner," to those who need help the most and can do nothing by themselves.

In their turn, human beings are called to respond to this compassionate God who takes the initiative. They must "fear" the Lord, in other words recognize him as the Source of their life and realize that all they have is a gift. They do this concretely by keeping God's commandments. But we should not imagine that this text emphasizes outward behavior only. The people are to love and serve the Lord "with their whole heart and their whole soul." A radical change of their entire being is required, a reorientation which Deuteronomy calls "circumcising the heart" (v. 10). We are well on the way towards the new covenant spoken of by the prophet Jeremiah, towards a religion which is one with life.

- By what acts of kindness and compassion has God loved me "first"?
- How do I express the fact that God is the Source of my life?
- What can we do to close the gap between the faith we profess and the life we live?

The paschal or Easter mystery, passing through death to a new and eternal Life, is at the heart of the Christian faith. It was shown in fullness in the existence of Jesus of Nazareth, "designated Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1,4). But this mystery continues to give meaning to the existence of all who walk in his steps. In this text, Saint Paul describes how the combat between death and life, and the victory of the latter, is still present in his daily life as an apostle.

As he tries to witness to the Good News of Christ during his journeys and encounters, Paul has to come to grips with the resistances which are the lot of all God's friends in a world which often has other priorities. He interprets these difficulties as the powers of death at work in him; in this way he experiences in his day-to-day life (that is the meaning of the word "body" in v. 10) "the dying of Jesus." But since his faith in the resurrection of Christ connects him to a Life which is stronger than death, his sufferings are in the end only an opportunity for this Life to manifest itself in an even more extensive and intensive way. Often, it is other people who harvest in their own existence the fruits of this life which he pours out for them, whereas Paul for his part only perceives its dark side.

Surprisingly, what makes possible this work of God in him is his own vulnerability, his human limits. To explain this, the apostle uses the image of a treasure in a jar of clay: the imperfections of the container make the content stand out even more. As time passes, the "outer being" has to fall apart in order to leave more and more room for what remains—a new being transfigured by the Spirit of God. And then another image, from the pen of Saint Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, expresses the final reality more clearly: a costly liquor which even renews the flask that contains it.

- "Christ continues to be put to death until the end of time."
- What do these words mean to me?
- Have I had experiences where my own limits enabled God to become more visible?
- How does God renew me day after day?

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

## The Church in Ukraine and Belarus

### Entirely New Discoveries

A brother has just returned from a three-week visit to Ukraine and Belarus. The situation in both countries has been under close scrutiny recently in the international media because of the accusations and criticisms levelled at the political leaders. Many people there understand that changes are necessary and in fact inevitable, however long it may take. But they also know that, since most of them spent seventy years under a regime which did not tolerate individual freedom, the necessary changes in society cannot be so rapid.

Of course the Church also suffered much during the Soviet period. In Minsk, the capital of Belarus and a city of

almost two million inhabitants, until the end of the 1980's only two Orthodox churches were allowed to remain open; for the whole country, with a population of ten million people, there was only one bishop. Now there are already ten Orthodox and four Catholic dioceses, and in Minsk some thirty-five parishes are registered. But only half of these parishes already have their own church building. Many celebrate their services in rooms rented from the city authorities, and one even in an old railway carriage!

Especially in the bigger towns, people are returning to the Church in ever larger numbers. It is not unusual for parents to bring their children to be baptized and to participate in Sunday schools which give a basic introduction to the Bible, Christian life and beliefs—and then to stay themselves to follow the same courses! Until ten years ago, even those who took the risk of going to church rarely had the opportunity to do more than be present for the service. Now,

too, there are more and more young people from families who have no contact with the Church who are seeking a deeper meaning to their lives through participation in local church communities. Some of them took this step after taking part in meetings in Taizé or in European meetings.

One of the most refreshing aspects of the visit to Ukraine and Belarus was to meet such young (and not so young) people who are setting out on this voyage of discovery—to discover what it means to place a very humble trust in God in our everyday lives, to find many older people who always understood the importance of this trust, even though for some of them it meant going to the point of giving their lives in the period when the Church was heavily persecuted.

During the visit, the reaction of those who are trying to be present and actively involved in the life of their local Church was often one of gratitude when

> 8



they saw that they were being encouraged in their efforts in a very simple way. They are not blind to the difficulties and tensions which exist within and between the Churches but again, as for society in general, nobody thought that these difficulties would disappear overnight.

In fact, it was very interesting to discover people in different parishes who refuse to accept the more intransigent public discourses concerning interchurch relations and who are quietly working towards greater understanding. Above all they want to show the majority of the population, who have no contact with the Church, that for them the Gospel message is of great importance.

In Minsk there are some parishes whose members are particularly active and which are an important focal point for the local community. One such parish in the western suburbs stands in the middle of a very big district where tens of thousands of people live. For some years the Orthodox Liturgy was celebrated in a tent on the building site where the new church was taking shape. Since it is not unusual for the temperature to fall as low as -30°C in winter, the strong desire to come together to pray was really put to the test! Now a small church is already completed and a much larger one is under construction, though when it will finally be completed is unsure, given the current economic problems. But the priests and parishioners did not wait for the building to be finished before building up the community. There are already some 500 people of all ages attending the parish Sunday school. There are also courses for those who wish to go further and who will be able themselves to lead Sunday-school classes in the future, as well as classes for the formation of future choir directors.

A special concern of the parish priest and his many helpers has always been to attend to those most in need in society. Each day of the week, homeless people can receive at least one warm meal. In addition, many mentally handicapped people are employed in full-time jobs in the parish, helping with cleaning or working for the small parish printing-company. There is a plan for up to 140 handicapped people eventually to be employed by the parish in workshops which are still under construction. Some young people, who have been to Taizé with a group from the parish, volunteer free time each week to help welcome handicapped children who otherwise would have little contact with others outside their own immediate family. A priest from the parish was one of the first to begin regular visits to prisoners in a city jail. One parishioner said that when she moved to that district of Minsk she did not like it because it consisted only of very large multi-storey tower

blocks stretching as far as the eye could see. But since the parish was founded, she started going to church for the first time and the simple presence of the church reconciled her with her district!

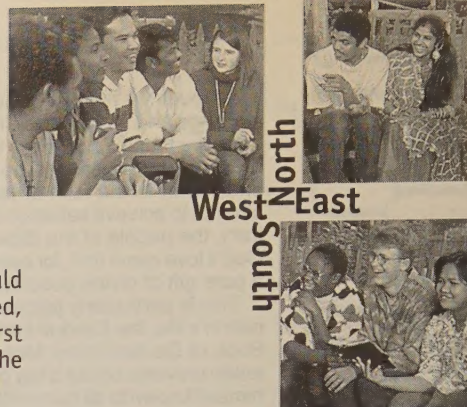
## Cambodia

### A Place of Martyrs and of Hope

From 29 August to 2 September, around 400 young adults from all the provinces and dioceses of Cambodia came together for their third "Youth Synod," which had taken on a special importance this year because of the Jubilee. The first evening saw buses, vans and minibuses depositing the young people and their leaders in the compound of the church, where provisional accommodation and showers had been set up. A huge kitchen run by helpers hummed like a beehive, feeding not only the participants but also people who work in the parish as well as sick people from the provinces waiting either to go into hospital or to go home.

The high point was the pilgrimage that was made to the place where a young bishop, Joseph Salas, died of exhaustion in 1977 after being sent to a forced labour camp. The Christians bought a piece of land close to the pagoda where the body of the young bishop was found, in Taing Kauk. With earth brought from each community in the country where Christians had been killed, they made a rice field. In the field they set up a cross. It has become the symbol of faithfulness in the Church of Cambodia. The place is now called "the place of martyrs and of hope." And so we made our way to this village, situated some 2½ hours from the capital. After the reading of the Gospel, young people from each region gave dramatic presentations of different aspects of the history of the Christians in Cambodia. These were scenes from what their parents and grandparents had lived, what many still live, and the great sobriety in the acting of the young people gave it a breathtaking truth. Their history became our own history and we became aware of our roots, even without knowing the people.

All this was played out in front of the cross. Around the cross were various symbols: the image of iron bars, recalling the loss of liberty; the image of leg-irons, recalling torture; the image of a broken rice bowl, recalling hunger and



thirst; the image of a rice field, recalling exhausting labour. But the most important symbol of all was the lotus flower, which is so important in traditional Khmer art. The lotus grows in the mud, but the flower comes to bloom in bright sunshine. This was to illustrate the words of the Gospel, "If the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies it bears much fruit."

In the evening when we returned, there was a prayer around the cross, as it is celebrated in Taizé every Friday evening. But here the Taizé songs were sung in Khmer.

## Letter from Taizé

Annual subscription  
**Ordinary subscription:**  
 40 FF (6 €) (France 30 FF (4,5 €))  
**Supporting subscription:** 75 (10 €) or 150 FF (20 €)

### Means of payment:

- by **credit card** Visa, Mastercard, Eurocard, Carte Bleue: send the number of your card and dates of validity to Taizé, and say what sum in French Francs you wish to transfer.
- by **international Giro transfer** in French Francs addressed to: Lettre de Taizé, CCP 20041-01007 -0061446M038-71 or CCP LYON 614 46 M.
- by **cheque** in French Francs to Lettre de Taizé, F-71250 Taizé Communauté, made payable through Société Générale.

In certain countries it is possible to pay **within the country:**

**Australia:** \$12 - Letter from Taizé, P.O. Box 769, North Sydney, NSW 2059  
**Canada:** \$10 (CIBC 010 04922 04 17130), Letter from Taizé c/o Lesley Santiago, 6643 Montevideo Road, Mississauga, Ontario L5N 4E8.  
**Ireland:** £5.50 - (Current Account N° 80985128) Letter from Taizé, c/o Stephanie Kiely, 19 Cherbury Park Road, Lucan, Co.Dublin  
**New Zealand:** \$15 - c/o Jenny Chisholm, 13 Arden Way, Wilton, Wellington.  
**UK:** £4.50 - Letter from Taizé, c/o Nick and Jane SHIELDS, 42 Blenheim Road, St Johns, WAKEFIELD, W. Yorkshire WF1 3JZ.  
**USA:** \$7 - Letter from Taizé, 132 Wagon Road, Roslyn Heights, NY 11577.  
 For Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, India, Italy, Korea, Netherlands, Norway, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden, write to Taizé to ask for the address in your country.

Correspondence:  
 Letter from Taizé, 71250 Taizé-Communauté, France  
 e-mail: [lettre@taize.fr](mailto:lettre@taize.fr) [www.taize.fr](http://www.taize.fr)  
 Lettre 218 - DRA V. Rogeaux - Com. par. 0105K79608 - DL 934  
 Ateliers et Presses de Taizé